

BRIEFLY

ATK beat Chennaiyin 3-1 to win ISL title

Margao: A rampaging ATK claimed an unprecedented third Indian Super League (ISL) title triumph with a 3-1 victory over arch-rival Chennaiyin FC in a summit showdown that was played behind closed doors here on Saturday. Javier Hernandez (10th) and Edu Garcia (48th) put ATK in the driving seat but Nerijus Valskis (69th) reduced their advantage to set up a tense end to the contest. Hernandez scored another in injury time (90+4th) to confirm a record third title. The final was held without spectators owing to the COVID-19 pandemic. The win will be sweeter for ATK as they will now merge with Mohun Bagan, who won the I-League title last week.

Goyat makes winning return to pro circuit

New Delhi: Indian boxer Neeraj Goyat on Saturday outpunched New Zealand's Obedi Maguchi in his first professional showdown in close to a year after being injured in an accident, in Auckland. Goyat prevailed in just two rounds of what was to be a six-round contest as his rival's corner "threw in the towel in the second round". Maguchi came into the contest with an experience of five fights, including three wins. Goyat's total fight count, on the other hand, is 16, inclusive of 11 wins. Goyat was hospitalised after suffering "severe injuries" following a car accident in June last year because of which he could not fight in a WBC Pearl World Championship clash against British star Amir Khan. The 27-year-old from Haryana met with the accident when he was returning home after training.

AFI seeks advice on conduct of Indian GP

New Delhi: The Athletics Federation of India (AFI) has sought the views of its national coaches and foreign experts regarding the conduct of the upcoming Indian Grand Prix (IGP) series competitions in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Indian Grand Prix series competitions are scheduled to be held on March 20 at Patiala, March 25 at Sangrur and March 29 at Delhi. In consultation with Adille J Sumariwalla, AFI president, who joined the meeting over phone, the committee unanimously agreed to assess the situation before conducting the Indian Grand Prix 2020.

Real Kashmir match cancelled

Srinagar: The I-League match between Real Kashmir FC and TRAU FC was cancelled on Saturday due to "unavailability of permission" from the local administration, the national football body said. In another match, Neroca FC played out an entertaining 2-2 draw against Chennai City FC in an intense I-League match that was held behind closed doors at the Khuman Lumpak Stadium in Imphal. The hosts went ahead after Khangam Horam (1st minute) found the net just 21 seconds after kick-off, registering the quickest goal of this season. Mashoor Sheriff (21st) equalised for the visitors midway through the first half before Adolfo Miranda Araujo (45+2nd), known as Fito, nicked the lead just seconds before the break. Philip Adjah (90th) saved the day for Neroca, converting a penalty in the added time to lay claim on a vital point for his side.

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Virus fallout: City's Euro ban appeal up in the air

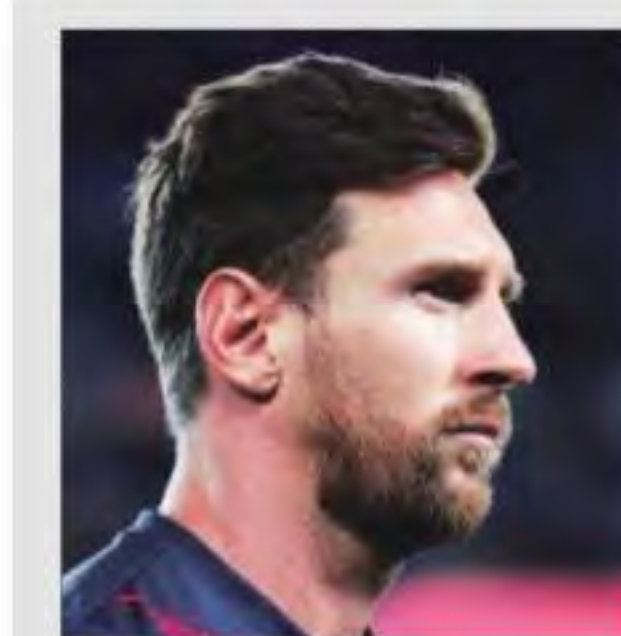
With Court of Arbitration for Sport postponing three hearings, English champions' hopes to get an early date for proceedings over their two-year ban is unlikely

HEARINGS STALLED, CITY MAY BE HIT The silver lining of possibly not having to give their title up to Liverpool in the wake of the unfortunate COVID-19 pandemic has quickly been extinguished for Manchester City after their appeal against their two-year UEFA ban from European football is up in the air as the Court of Arbitration for Sport in Switzerland deals with the impact of the coronavirus. City had hoped to have their hearing heard by early summer but that may be optimistic given the court in Lausanne has already postponed three hearings and has 16 cases already scheduled until May 18, with the City case not yet listed. CAS Secretary General Matthieu Reeb told Reuters that the court was already making adjustments and was "monitoring the situation closely and continually adapting to the changing circumstances".

MARIJNE POSTPONES FAMILY VISIT Indian women's hockey coach Sjorde Marijne had to postpone his week-long trip back to the Netherlands because of the

travel ban in place as the COVID-19 spread across the globe. "Had to turn around on my way to the airport to go to my family. The risk is too great that I can't return to India. Hard times for everyone and for me now that I can't see my family and I don't know when this is going to happen," he had tweeted earlier. Marijne was supposed to travel to the Netherlands on Friday night for a week during a brief break of the national camp of the women's hockey team. The campers are scheduled to assemble for the camp again at the SAI, South Centre in Bengaluru on March 22.

RUSSIA ASKS FOR BIGGER SLICE OF EUROS Russia is offering to host more European Championship games as UEFA considers whether the tournament can go ahead. Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Chernyshenko says Russia, which hosted the 2018 World Cup, could hold more than its scheduled three group games and one quarterfinal match in St. Petersburg. According to state news agency Tass, Chernyshenko said, "we



Lionel Messi has urged Spaniards to stay at home via an Instagram post.

MESSI ASKS SPANIARDS TO ACT RESPONSIBLY

Lionel Messi has joined hands in helping the Spanish government propagate the message of staying at home amid the ongoing pandemic that is coronavirus. "It is the moment to act responsibly and to stay home," Messi wrote on Instagram on Saturday. The Barcelona star added: "We are worried by what is happening and we want to help by putting ourselves in the place of those who are having the most difficulties, either because they or their families or friends are directly affected, or because they are working on the frontline in hospitals."

absolutely could expand the tournament program." He added that, "Russia is ready for however the situation develops."

IN ITALY, IT'S PLAYERS VS FEDERATION The Italian players association aired their frustration and said they were "saddened and outraged" at the fact that clubs were still asking players to attend training sessions, despite the COVID-19 pandemic and the effects being faced by Italy in particular. In a statement, the players' association notes that "some clubs" are

bringing in players to train in small groups, "or, even worse, for daily checks of their temperature." Italy is the European country hit worst by the virus, where the number of virus cases climbed to over nearly 20,000, with more than 1,000 deaths. The government in Rome has ordered an unprecedented lockdown, ordering businesses to close and restricting people's movement. The lockdown has suspended all sports in the country through at least April 3.

SHASHANK NAIR

Will host Olympics as planned: Abe

Japan's Prime Minister allays fears a day after Donald Trump calls for postponement of the Games

REUTERS
TOKYO, MARCH 14

JAPAN IS still preparing to host the Olympics, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said on Saturday, despite rising global concern about the viability of the summer Games due to the coronavirus outbreak.

Abe and his government have been adamant the Olympics will go ahead, even as other global sporting events have been put on hold. Speculation about a delay from the July start date has grown since U.S. President Donald Trump said organisers should consider a one-year postponement.

Abe and Trump held a call after those comments, prompting the U.S. president to say on Twitter that the Olympic venue was magnificent. But this may not be enough to assuage sponsors of the Games, who are increasingly nervous about how the outbreak impacts the competition.

The Olympic Torch relay, in which the Olympic flame typically starts a tour around the host nation, is due to start in the Japanese prefecture of Fukushima in less than two weeks. The tour of the torch through Greece has already been cut short. "We will overcome the spread of the infection and host the Olympics without problem, as planned," Abe told a news conference in Tokyo, adding that delaying or cancelling the Olympics was "not a subject at all" in his call with Trump.

He said Japan working closely with the International Olympic Committee, which will have the final decision whether the Games go ahead, and the U.N. World Health Organization, suggesting he accepted that Tokyo would not ultimately decide on the event. He said Japan had a relatively low infection rate and had not seen an explosion in cases as seen in South Korea, China, Italy, Iran and elsewhere. He said delaying the peak of infections was vital to ensure treatment of those in critical condition. Abe said Japan did not need to declare a national emergency, although parliament on Friday approved a bill to give him emergency powers and allow him to close schools, halt large gatherings and requisition medical supplies.

Torch relay

Tokyo Governor Yuriko Koike promised thorough measures against the coronavirus outbreak and said preparations for a "safe



Actor Gerard Butler lights an altar as he takes part in the Tokyo Olympics torch relay in Sparta, Greece, on Friday. Reuters

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and secure" Games were progressing, TV Asahi reported. Greece's Olympic Committee cancelled on Friday the remainder of the Olympic Torch relay through Greece to avoid attracting crowds, while the relay through Japan is scheduled to start on March 26.

Japan had 21 new coronavirus cases as of Saturday evening, bringing the total 1,443, public broadcaster NHK reported, while the has killed 28 people in Japan. The total infections included 697 from the Diamond Princess cruise ship and 14 returnees on chartered flights from China, according to NHK. Japan's fatalities included those from the ship.

Tokyo Governor Yuriko Koike vowed to

take thorough measures against the coronavirus outbreak for the Olympic Torch relay through Japan and reaffirmed that preparations for a "safe and secure" 2020 Games were progressing, TV Asahi reported.

Koike's comments came after Greece's Olympic Committee on Friday cancelled the remainder of the Olympic Torch relay through the country to avoid attracting crowds that could raise the risk of virus contagion. The Olympic Torch relay through Japan is scheduled to start on March 26 in northern Fukushima prefecture. "(We're) taking thorough infection measures with regards to the Olympic Torch relay domestically," Koike said according to TV Asahi, adding that preparations for a safe and secure Games were moving forward.

Japan has sought to dispel speculation that the Tokyo 2020 Summer Games could be cancelled or postponed over the coronavirus outbreak, which has crippled global travel and brought the sports world to a virtual standstill.

TRACKING THE VIRUS

■ The All India Football Federation suspended football tournaments across all domestic levels till March 31.

■ The International Hockey Federation has called off the ongoing Pro League till April 15. India's next match, in Germany is on April 26.

■ An international friendly between Germany on Italy, scheduled for March 31, has been cancelled.

■ Sampdoria midfielder Fabio Depaoli has announced he's tested positive for COVID-19. He's the 10th Serie A player confirmed positive and the sixth at Sampdoria. Bundesliga, too, recorded its first positive case.

After more than a month, Wuhan football team to leave Spain

ASSOCIATED PRESS
MADRID, MARCH 14

THE CHINESE soccer team that was originally stuck in Spain because of the coronavirus outbreak is going back home to try to avoid its rapid spread in Europe. Wuhan Zall was expected to return to China on Saturday, nearly one-and-a-half months after it arrived in Spain for preseason training.

The team had not been able to leave because of the restrictions in China, but expedited its departure because of the worsening situation in Spain.

The team initially planned to leave Spain mid-February but had extended its stay in the southern region of the country until at least the end of March. That plan changed this week because of the sharp spike in the number of cases in Spain and Europe generally.

"Things are well over there (in China) now," Jose Gonzalez, the team's Spanish coach, told The Associated Press on Saturday. "The Chinese league will likely start at the beginning of May. We will have to enter quarantine when we arrive, so the sooner we leave, the better."

The team will first go to the city of Shenzhen, where it is expected to finish its preseason training for the Chinese Super League, the country's main first-division soccer competition. The league was supposed to start on Feb. 22 but was suspended because of the virus.

The city of Wuhan was the epicenter of the outbreak that rapidly spread to other countries and infected more than 145,000 people worldwide, with 5,400 deaths. Spain was set to follow Italy on Saturday in declaring a nationwide lockdown as European countries took ever more sweeping measures to reduce contact among people and slow the accelerating spread of the coronavirus.

Health authorities in Spain said more than 5,700 people were infected and the number of cases could reach 10,000 in the coming days.

For most people, the new coronavirus causes only mild or moderate symptoms, such as fever and cough. For some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness, including pneumonia.

The vast majority of people recover. The number of new cases have dwindled in China, where more than 65,000 people recovered from the virus. The nation has been easing up on lockdown measures in its hardest-hit region that included the city of Wuhan.

None of the Wuhan Zall players were infected when the team arrived in Spain, but the grandmother of one player was among the coronavirus-linked deaths back home. Players have been away from home for several months because the team began its pre-season in the Chinese city of Guangzhou, nearly 1,000 kilometers (620 miles) away from Wuhan.

Although the team was far away from the initial outbreak, Spanish health authorities had to come out publicly to say there was no reason for local citizens to be concerned about the squad's arrival in January. Three players arrived from China later and had to stay in quarantine and be tested for the virus before joining the rest of the group.

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CHANGING TRACK

In a bid to run at the Olympics, Semanya switches to 200m



Caster Semenya, who ran 800m, will compete in 200m event now. File

ASSOCIATED PRESS
MARCH 14

CASTER SEMENYA is looking for another Olympic run. A different one, too.

Banned from competing in her favorite race and defending her title, the Olympic 800-meter champion is trying to make the Tokyo Games anyway - by switching to the 200 meters. Semenya announced her decision on her Instagram account on Friday, saying her desire "to compete at the highest level of sport" drove her to try to qualify for the Olympics in an unfamiliar race for her. "This decision has not been an easy one but, as always, I look forward to the challenge and will work hard, doing all I can to qualify for Tokyo and compete to the best of my ability for South Africa," she said.

Under the world track and field body's highly criticized testosterone regulations, Semenya and other female athletes with high natural testosterone are barred from races from 400 meters to one mile at top-level meets like the Olympics and world championships unless they undergo treat-

ment to reduce their hormone levels for six months prior to running.

Semenya has refused to do so, calling the rules and the medical intervention required unfair and unethical. Athletes are given three choices to lower their testosterone: birth control pills, hormone-blocking injections or surgery. But the regulations don't apply to the 200 meters and that gives Semenya a chance to run at her third Olympics, even if it's not in the race she wants to run in.

It won't be easy. Semenya has rarely run the 200 meters, and only at lower-level events. She didn't compete at all over the distance between 2016 and early 2019, and she is well off the pace of the world's leading women. The 29-year-old South African needs to improve her personal best by nearly two seconds just to qualify for the Tokyo Olympics. Her best is 24.26 seconds, in South Africa in February 2019. The Olympic qualifying standard for the women's 200 is 22.80 seconds. Semenya's PB wouldn't have got her out of the heats at the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Olympics.

But at least Semenya has a goal now after being in limbo for nearly a year after making an unsuccessful appeal of World

Athletics' testosterone regulations at the Court of Arbitration for Sport last May.

That left Semenya with a choice: Submit to medical treatment to lower her testosterone or stay away from the 800 meters. Defiant, she chose to stay away and hasn't run an 800-meter race since winning at the Prefontaine Classic in June last year; her 31st straight victory over two laps. She wasn't able to defend her title at last year's world championships. Semenya's decision to try the 200 may signal she has given up on her second legal challenge against the regulations. That second appeal is still being considered by the Swiss Federal Tribunal and a ruling is due in the coming weeks. She lost her first appeal at CAS last year by a 2-1 majority of the panel of judges.

A favorable decision from the Swiss supreme court could still overturn the testosterone rules and allow Semenya to compete in the 800 again without hormone-reducing treatment, but her chances of winning the appeal are seen as slim. World Athletics' new testosterone rules apply to female athletes like Semenya with conditions known as differences of sex developments (DSDs). Semenya was born with the typical male XY chromo-

some pattern but also female traits. She was legally identified as female at birth and has been identified as female her entire life, but World Athletics says she is "biologically male" - an assertion she has rejected angrily.

World Athletics says higher testosterone gives women like Semenya an unfair athletic advantage. Semenya's story has been one of the most contentious in sport ever since she arrived as an unknown teenager and won gold at the 2009 world championships amid a gender-test storm.

She has won two Olympic titles and three world titles in the 800 meters and is the reigning Olympic champion but has now been barred from running twice in her career. The first time she was sidelined by World Athletics, then known as the IAAF, was in 2009 in the wake of the gender controversy at the world championships.

Semenya hinted she might switch to the 200 when she won a rarely run 300-meter race and broke the South African record last month, her first race over any distance in eight months. After that victory, she declared: "I'm here to stay. Track and field, you will still see my face."